

## POLITICAL AMBITION

Chapter 3 opened with a story about the gap between American men and women and their affiliation with the Republican and Democratic parties, respectively. Another striking gap that occurs in U.S. politics, as well as in other countries with patriarchal roots, is that women engage in many traditional political acts at lower rates than men. U.S. women, for example, not only have lower levels of political knowledge and self-report lower levels of political interest but are also less apt to engage in political discussions, attempt to persuade others' vote choice, donate money to a political candidate or cause, or volunteer to work for a candidate or political party.<sup>1-7</sup> Of particular consequence is that this reluctance to engage in traditional political activity extends to women's **political ambition**, or their willingness to run for public office.<sup>8</sup> This chapter first unpacks reasons why women have low levels of political ambition compared to men, in particular exploring why motivating women to run for office has been so much more difficult than most Second-Wave scholars anticipated. It also explores what happens when women do put themselves forward as candidates, as well as whether the sheer number of women inspired to run in the 2018 midterm elections finally will help transform the electoral arena in ways that bolster women's political ambition in the future.

Women's tendency to avoid most forms of traditional political participation does not mean that they are uninterested in political outcomes. Women were initially precluded from formal means of participation linked to elections and office holding—like working on a campaign, making a campaign contribution, or contacting a government official. Their participation in these tactics still falls short of men's. But women always have embraced informal activities—including boycotting products and services, signing petitions, joining voluntary associations, volunteering in the community, and organizing social movements.<sup>9</sup> Channeling political interest through these gender-conforming tactics emerges with adolescence.<sup>10</sup> For example, Alozie, Simon, and Merrill (2003) found that school-aged girls were more likely to see voting as important—and were more interested in media coverage of political issues and of electoral campaigns—than similarly-aged boys. Yet young women often claim to be disinterested in “politics” even when they have strong opinions about inherently political issues, like reproductive rights, use of military force, and

public policies.<sup>1112</sup> Similarly, while women are reluctant to engage in political discussion in **masculine-coded public settings** (i.e., those typically considered the domain of men, like radio call-in shows, letters to the editor, or town hall meetings), they are willing to engage in public talk about the issues they care about in feminized public settings. These include carefully organized deliberative forums, where preferred modes of talk and action emphasize feminine values over masculine ones (for example, favoring civility over conflict or helping over winning).<sup>13</sup> By the time they reach college, young women are much more apt to claim that the best way to make their community and country a better place is to volunteer for a charity (at 40%, compared to only 27% of young men), while young men are more likely to embrace running for office (at 28%, compared to only 15% of young women).<sup>14</sup> At some point in their political socialization, women learn to express political opinions and to seek political influence in gender-conforming settings and in gender-conforming ways that differ markedly from men's.

Yet, a knee-jerk reaction, grounded both in patriarchy's embrace of gender essentialism and in Americans' embrace of radical individualism, is to use these differences to bolster the claim that men and women really are different and suited for different functions in society. Some women began running for public office, including the office of the presidency, in the 1800s, even before they earned the right to vote. Since women have been enfranchised fully for nearly 100 years, one simplistic explanation of persistent patterns is to assume that if women really wanted to debate political issues, volunteer for a political party, or stand for public office, they would. For some, women's failure to opt in to these activities in larger numbers serves as evidence that women, unlike men, are "naturally" apolitical and disinterested in wielding political influence. Before drawing this simplistic conclusion, this chapter asks you to consider other explanations, including the long reach of our patriarchal history. Further, as Box 4.1 indicates, comparing other countries to the United States reveals that institutional and cultural factors—and not innate gender differences—play an important role in whether women consider running for office.

## BOX 4.1: COMPARATIVE FEATURE

### Studies of Women's Political Ambition in Comparative Perspective

**Americanists** are political scientists who focus on the United States, but **comparativists** focus on countries other than America. When studying women's political participation, comparativists tend to explore how institutional (often called **demand variables**) and cultural factors that vary across countries influence women's political behavior. They are less likely to investigate how individual

traits (often called **supply variables**) such as political ambition propel or impede women's candidacies. Although no comprehensive worldwide study of women's political ambition exists, scholars have studied women's political ambition in an array of countries, listed in Table 4.1.<sup>15-19</sup> Findings suggest that women worldwide often do not *significantly* differ from men in their political ambition, and sometimes women have more ambition than men, as ambition (supply) interacts with institutional structure (demands).

**Table 4.1 Studies of Women's Political Ambition in Comparative Perspective**

Country (Electoral system and quotas)	Authors (Publication date)	Study's Respondents (Year of data)	Findings on Political Ambition of Women and Men	Women Less Ambitious than Men? (Yes or no; statistically significant?)
Argentina	Schwindt-Bayer (2011)	68 national legislators, women and men (2001–2002)	43.8% of women legislators and 50% of men legislators aspire to stay in the current office they hold.	Yes, but statistically significant <i>only</i> for legislators aspiring to higher political office.
			31.3% of women legislators and 77.3% of men legislators aspire to higher political offices.	
Colombia	Schwindt-Bayer (2011)	176 national legislators, women and men (2001–2002)	66.7% of women legislators and 77.5% of men legislators aspire to stay in the current office they hold.*	Yes, but <i>not</i> statistically significant.
			64.3% of women legislators and 77.3% of men legislators aspire to higher political offices.*	

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Costa Rica	Schwindt-Bayer (2011)	50 national legislators, women and men (2001–2002)	20.0% of women legislators and 43.6% of men legislators aspire to stay in the current office they hold.	Yes, but <i>not</i> statistically significant.
			44.4% of women legislators and 68.4% of men legislators aspire to higher political offices.	
Germany	Davidson-Schmich (2016)	465 high ranking members of political parties (date needed)	50% of women and 59% of men in parties with voluntary quotas had considered running for a political position.	Yes, but <i>only</i> statistically significant for willingness to accept a hypothetical nomination for local elective office.
			65% of women and 73% of men in parties with voluntary quotas would be willing to accept a hypothetical nomination for local elected office.	
			30% of women and 38% of men in parties with voluntary quotas would agree to appear on the ballot for high-level elective office.**	
Japan	Dalton (2015)	17 national legislators, women only (2007–2008)	Women avoid claiming overt ambition and instead frame their political participation as a matter of caring and working for others and as a result of their connections with men in politics.***	*NA—interviews with no statistical test

Pakistan	Rincker, Aslam, and Isani (2017)	62 supporters of the Pakistani Lawyers' Movement, women and men who tended to be urban, elite, and highly educated. (2007–2009)	72% of women and 68% of men who are supporters of the movement had considered running for office.	No for considering running for office, but <i>not</i> statistically significant.
			48% of women and 50% of men had talked to a political party leader about running for office.	Yes for talking to political party leader, but <i>not</i> statistically significant.
			5% of women and 34% of men had discussed running for office with a community leader.	Yes for talking to political party leader, and statistically significant.
Spain	Galais, Öhberg and Coller (2016)	133 national legislators, women and men (2009–2011)	55% of women legislators and 44% of men legislators wanted to stay in politics.	Yes, but <i>not</i> statistically significant.
Sweden	Galais, Öhberg and Coller (2016)	181 national legislators, women and men (2011)	50% of women legislators and 50% of men legislators wanted to stay in politics.	No

Sources: Dalton, E. (2015). *Women and politics in contemporary Japan*. New York, NY: Routledge; Davidson-Schmich, L. K. (2016). *Gender quotas and democratic participation: Recruiting candidates for elective offices in Germany*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press; Galais, C., Öhberg, P., & Coller, X. (2016). Endurance at the top: Gender and political ambition of Spanish and Swedish MPs. *Politics and Gender* 1(2); Rincker, M., Aslam, G., & Isani, M. (2017). Crossed my mind, but ruled it out: Political ambition and gender in the Pakistani lawyers' movement 2007–2009. *International Political Science Review*, 38(4), 246–63; Schwindt-Bayer, (L). 2011. Women who win: Social backgrounds, paths to power, and political ambition in Latin American Legislatures. *Politics and Gender*, 7(1), 1–33.

\*These numbers represent percentages for respondents from the lower house of the legislature in Colombia. Swindt-Bayer (2011) also reports numbers from the Senate that are not included here.

\*\* the Landtag, Bundestag, or European Parliament.

\*\*\*Due to Japanese culture, men would also avoid overt ambition.

What might explain why women in countries other than the United States are more ambitious? Ambition is stifled when women, who tend to be more risk-averse than men, believe they will not succeed in politics.<sup>20</sup> Institutional factors such as the proportional representation electoral system (PR), sex-based electoral quotas, and reserved parliamentary seats for women can improve the “recruitment environment” for women, pulling them into politics (see Chapter 6 for greater discussion).<sup>21,22</sup> These factors also increase women’s chances to win and arguably lower their fear of losing. In the United States, the majoritarian electoral system still favors incumbents who tend to be white men (see Chapters 5 and 6). Thus, many other countries have institutional settings with greater political opportunities that cultivate ambition.<sup>23</sup> This seems to be the case in Pakistan. In Pakistan, Rincker, Aslam, and Isani (2017) find that *more* women than men have thought of running for office because the “presence of reserved seats in Parliament for women [i.e., 17 percent of Parliament seats are legally required to be filled by women] . . . and the presence of a recent executive role model [i.e., Benazir Bhutto as Prime Minister].”<sup>24</sup> Similarly, voluntary political party quotas in Germany bring more women into politics because some parties have promised to increase the number of women within their organizations; however, fewer German women than men who are eligible candidates actually want to run for election, suggesting that quotas may not be enough of an incentive to overcome other factors influencing German women’s political ambition.<sup>25</sup>

The gap in participation in the United States, meanwhile, at least partially reflects a “hang-over” effect from women’s historic exclusion from public life. Even after winning the right to vote in 1920, it took women time to become habitual voters—in the same way that it takes other newly enfranchised groups of citizens, such as first generation immigrants, time to become regular voters. Not only did American women who came of age just before the Nineteenth Amendment was passed continue to vote at lower rates than women born after them, they

passed on their ambivalence toward the ballot to their daughters.<sup>26,27</sup> Hence in the 1920 election, only one third of eligible women voted,<sup>28</sup> and women’s voter turnout did not exceed 50% until the 1948 presidential election. Women continued to underperform at the ballot box, in comparison to men, until 1968. Yet since 1984, women overall (as well as when compared



► **Photo 4.1** Women standing in line to vote in Pakistan.

to men who share their racial and ethnic identity) have slightly out-voted men in national elections. Intersectional identities, however, affected patterns of voter turnout from the time of women's suffrage, as native-born, middle-to-upper-class, and white women initially had higher levels of turnout than immigrant, rural, and poor women.<sup>29,30</sup> Up until 2004, white women voted at higher rates than other women—a distinction they ceded to African American women in 2008 and 2012. African American women's strong participation in these elections was likely a response to Barack Obama's historic presidential campaigns. Their participation rates dropped in 2016 but rebounded in 2018.

## PROMOTING WOMEN'S ACCESS AND AMBITION

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Both academics and activists initially anticipated that women's participation in governance would gradually increase over time, like voting, until women were fully integrated into the political process. Because similar educational and occupational opportunities transpired for men and women after the First and Second Waves of feminism, many anticipated that women's lived experiences would converge with men's, at which point women would overcome barriers to full participation and would assimilate into the existing political structure. This expectation overlaps with the liberal feminist tactics described in Chapter 1; it suggests that if women have opportunities and resources they will gain access to political processes and institutions rather than having to fundamentally transform them so that they better accommodate women's lives and how they are different from men's.

Women's full participation in public life—especially serving in political office—is an important indicator of a robust democracy. The United States has a federal system of government designed to disperse power away from the central, national government. Diffusing government authority throughout the federal system means that about 500,000 citizens at any given time must be willing to serve in local, state, and national elected positions, so that the electorate has a choice in representation. Holding contested elections requires that at least twice this number must be interested in running for office. As political scientist Joseph Schlesinger noted, “A political system unable to kindle ambitions for office is in danger of breaking down as one unable to restrain ambitions.”<sup>31</sup> The failure to generate political ambition among more than half the population has implications for our ability to recruit an adequate number of public servants, especially in recent decades when Americans, men and women alike, have turned toward private life and away from public service and civic duty.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, as the ensuing chapters on the effect of women legislators, executives, and judges indicate, women have different lived experiences than men—which affects the types of issues they prioritize, as well as their approach to deliberation and problem-solving. When women do not seek public office, the types of issues government addresses, as well as the way elected officials discuss and resolve issues are affected.



Early studies of **candidate emergence**—when someone throws his or her hat into the ring and runs for office—treated political ambition as a given. Scholars assumed that some subset of U.S. men citizens would always have political ambition. So instead of studying how people developed political ambition in the first place, they studied how those with ambition decided whether or not to run. This research started with the assumption that politicians are rational actors, and it attempted to understand which factors—including the likelihood of winning—the potential politicians were likely to include in an internal cost-benefit analysis before seeking office.<sup>33</sup>

Thus, early studies noting that women were often reluctant to run for office assumed that after the Second Wave in the 1960s and 1970s, women would gain access to higher education and professional careers, and their lives and experiences would start to more closely resemble men's. Political scientist Susan Welch first developed this argument in a 1977 article, noting that women's full participation in public life was constrained by situational, socialization, and structural factors.<sup>34</sup> **Situational factors** described women's ongoing domestic responsibilities. Given the way families and households were structured in the 1970s, women still often found themselves primarily responsible for not only managing their households but also for the care and feeding of husbands and children. **Socialization factors**, meanwhile, emphasized the way influential actors in society (parents, teachers, and authority figures) overwhelmingly encouraged women to embrace traditional feminine traits such as passivity and traditional feminine roles, such as caregiver. Finally, **structural factors** focused on the fact that few women fell into the demographic categories typically associated with successful political careers, including holding bachelors and professional degrees, earning a high income, or working as business executives and lawyers. Nearly 20 years later, another major study of political participation reached similar conclusions. Sidney Verba, Kay Lehman Schlozman, and Henry Brady<sup>35</sup> found three key experiences affected everyone's ability to participate in politics. These include experiences that cultivate necessary resources (which includes money but more importantly civic and political skills), provide engagement (such as processing political information, developing political preferences, and cultivating political interest), and extend invitations (whereby people are regularly asked to participate in civic and political affairs). They found that women's historical confinement to the domestic sphere meant that far fewer women were capable of cultivating key political resources (money and civic skills), which in turn resulted in less engagement and fewer invitations to participate. Similar to Welch,<sup>36</sup> Verba and Schlozman (along with Nancy Burns) later concluded that once women gained equal access to the type of education and careers that cultivate civic and political skills and yield higher incomes, "then it would follow as the day the night: gender differences in political participation would disappear."<sup>37</sup> Focusing on women's access to education and occupations as the primary barrier to their political ambition led others



to build statistical models predicting that, excluding incumbents, half of the challengers running for state legislature in 2006 would be women.<sup>38</sup> They concluded that “a substantial part of the underrepresentation of women in public office in the United States is because of their underrepresentation in this eligible pool” and that, “changing the occupational distribution of women would influence their recruitment to public office.”<sup>39</sup>

As predicted, young women were eager to take advantage of the broad access to education provided to them for the first time, when Congress passed Title IX of the Education Amendments in 1972. **Title IX** bars sex discrimination in education programs and activities offered by any school that receives federal funding. Before Title IX, women had difficulty going on to college or university.



Los Angeles Times photographic archive, UCLA Library

► **Photo 4.2** The ratio of men to women on college campuses prior to Title IX.

Elite private universities and colleges (like Harvard and Yale or Bates and Dartmouth) had quotas to restrict the number of women admitted—if they admitted them at all. Requiring women applicants to have higher GPAs and test scores than men was common practice on many public and private campuses. Yet despite being more qualified, women were either officially prevented or informally discouraged from pursuing traditionally men-dominated programs in medicine, law, and business. For example, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, and decades later Hillary Clinton, were discouraged by administrators and faculty members from attending Harvard Law School. In her memoir, Clinton (2017) describes her decision to attend Yale Law School after a Harvard professor told her, “We don’t need any more women at Harvard,”<sup>40</sup> during a campus visit.

Not surprisingly, then, only 8% of women age 19 and older were college graduates in 1970, compared with 14% of men. Yet by 2009, approximately 28% of U.S. women had a college degree.<sup>41</sup> Women students quickly achieved parity with men on college campuses by the late 1970s, and their numbers have advanced steadily ever since. By 2010, they constituted approximately 58% of college students nationwide, while simultaneously earning higher grades and being more likely to complete college than their men peers. Now, not only are women more likely than men to earn bachelor’s degrees among most racial and ethnic groups and across all socioeconomic distributions,<sup>42,43</sup> since 2011, they have also been more likely to earn a graduate degree.<sup>44</sup>

## BOX 4.2: COMPARATIVE FEATURE

### Access to Medical School Scandal in Japan

While many take women's access to higher education and professional schools for granted in established democracies, a recent scandal in Japan makes it clear that women's battle for access to education is ongoing. In 2018, an investigation into the admission process at Tokyo Medical University revealed university officials regularly altered women applicants' test scores in order to reduce the number of women admitted. The practice, while likely in use by at least 2006, was ramped up in 2010, when successful women applicants spiked up to 38% of incoming students—which admissions officials deemed too many. As a result, hundreds of women across nearly a decade were systematically discriminated against and were denied admission in favor of less-qualified men. In Japan, women are expected to be almost entirely responsible for the household and family caregiving, while men are expected to be ideal workers who work long hours without complaint. (These same expectations also mean that Japanese voters historically have been leery of electing mothers to serve in public office, as Box 4.1 notes). A former admissions official anonymously explained that women were denied entry to medical school because officials believed that they were likely to quit after marrying and starting families and that they would not want to pursue the most time-consuming and rigorous assignments, such as pursuing surgical specialties or working in remote areas. Clearly, binary gender roles and expectations still affect women's opportunities—even in countries where laws officially prohibit discrimination based on sex.<sup>45–47</sup>



► **Photo 4.3** Japanese women protest medical school admission scandal.

Despite their dramatic success in undergraduate, graduate, and professional programs, however, women are still underrepresented in the fields long associated with men's political careers. In 2017, for example, women were 50.3% of law school graduates but constituted just over 34% of lawyers at law firms. Further,

their share of equity partnerships, a position associated with decision-making authority and higher income, remained stuck at just 20%.<sup>48</sup>

Women fared even less well in business, where women made up 48% of entry-level positions in 2017 but just 21% of those in the **C-suite**, which refers to women in the highest levels of senior management that normally have titles starting with C (i.e., CEO). Only 3% of these top executive positions were held by women of color.<sup>49</sup> The **glass ceiling** (the metaphor used to describe how women can see the top of a company/government but not reach it) is even thicker in Fortune 500 Companies, where the number of women executives dropped in 2017—which meant that women comprised only 4.8% of the chief executives at America’s most profitable companies.<sup>50</sup> Among women of color, rates are even lower, occupying only 1 in 30 of senior level positions.

Given these statistics, perhaps it is no surprise to learn that lack of anticipated progress also characterizes women in politics, which we cover in greater depth in Chapters 6, 7, and 8. The puzzle of too few women American elected officials persists even when the most likely explanations, including access to education and voter bias and incumbency, covered in Chapter 5, are eliminated as explanations.

## GENDER SOCIALIZATION AND POLITICAL AMBITION

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The interrelated problems of a half-empty pipeline and a persistent plateau led scholars to reexamine sex, gender, and candidate emergence, in order to understand why—despite access to higher education, professional employment, supportive voters, and political opportunities—women still have comparatively lower levels of political ambition than men. Rather than taking political ambition as a given, scholars began to ask how ambition emerges in the first place. Jennifer L. Lawless and Richard L. Fox undertook two studies—titled *It Takes a Candidate* and *It Still Takes a Candidate*—to explore the emergence of **nascent political ambition**, which they define as the inclination to consider becoming a candidate.<sup>51,52</sup> They argued that nascent political ambition must precede **expressive political ambition**, where individuals engage in a cost-benefit analysis and consider whether to run for a specific seat.<sup>53</sup> Lawless and Fox conducted two waves of the Citizen Political Ambition Panel Study in 2001 and 2008, each time surveying men and women working in law, business, education, and politics—the four professions previous scholars had identified as most associated with a political career. Unlike average citizens, both the women and men included in this study regularly interacted with elected officials, engaged in traditional political activity, and—not surprisingly—were more interested in political issues and events than most people. Despite these similarities, men had much higher levels of nascent and expressive political ambition.

Lawless and Fox identified a consistent 16-point difference when men and women answered the question: “Have you ever considered running for office?”<sup>54,55</sup> In their 2001 survey, 59% of likely men candidates responded affirmatively,

compared to only 43% of their women counterparts. The follow-up study revealed that of those who responded affirmatively, 20% of the men actually ran for a public office, compared to only 15% of the women. The result is that across the eight years from 2001 to 2008, 12% of the men included in the study actively sought public office, compared to only 7% of women.<sup>56</sup> Keep in mind that intersectionality likely affects the reasons why women with different cross-cutting identities are less interested in pursuing political careers, as women are not a monolithic group. Scholars are now beginning to explore nuanced differences in the way women develop political ambition. Moreover, the type of positions that women and men were interested in pursuing differed. While both were interested in running for local positions, such as school board or town council seats, women were far less interested in running for more prominent local and state positions, like mayor, governor, or state legislator or for positions at the national level, like U.S. representative, U.S. senator, or president. Men, for example, were 40% more likely to consider running for state legislature and about 50% more likely to consider pursuing federal office.<sup>57</sup>

Therefore, simply waiting for the second round of educational and professional gains that women made in the 1970s and 1980s to take root and flourish is not likely to yield more progress in numbers of women in government for two reasons. First, the gap in nascent political ambition among members of the overall general public actually grew between 2001 and 2011—a result of men's interest in public office remaining constant (at about 22%), with women's dropping 4% (from 18% to 14%).<sup>58</sup> Research measuring political ambition in which subjects were asked to watch Hillary Clinton's 2016 campaign ads confirms that while her candidacy inspired her women supporters to run for office, it suppressed other women's, along with men's, political ambition.<sup>59</sup> Lawless and Fox further speculate that contrary to the anticipated impact of visible women politicians, women's enthusiasm for public service likely diminished after observing what other women endured throughout their bids for national office.<sup>60</sup> While Hillary Clinton and Sarah Palin served as role models for many in 2008, they also provided a prominent reminder that women candidates have barriers to overcome that men do not, barriers such as sexist media coverage, questions about their family and life choices, overt sexual harassment, and misogynist online abuse (all covered in more detail in Chapters 5 and 7). This should give us pause as the 116th Congress, elected in the 2018 election, is more female and more diverse than ever before. While having women of color represented in Congress may serve to be important in raising the ambition of some, if they are attacked, we may see a decrease in the political ambition of girls and women of color down the road. Second, generational replacement does not appear likely to fix the problem, as young women have been no more ambitious than older women by the time they begin their professional careers. While adolescents report similar levels of political ambition, with about two-thirds in each group rejecting a political career, a gap emerges between the sexes by the time they are college-aged and persists into adulthood.

By this point in their lives, 14% of men indicate that they definitely plan to run for office, compared to only 7% of women in their age cohort. Meanwhile, 36% of college-aged young women claim to have “absolutely no interest” in running for office, compared to only 23% of their men peers.<sup>61,62</sup>

## BOX 4.3: THE “CHILLY” CAMPUS CLIMATE AND YOUNG WOMEN’S POLITICAL AMBITION

Lawless and Fox (2013) attribute the decline in college-women’s political ambition to newfound freedom to control activities and coursework.<sup>63</sup> While high school curricula has structured requirements for all students, women can self-select into college electives, majors, and co-curricular activities that conform to traditional gender roles—and that exposes young women to fewer experiences that bolster political interest (like taking a political science course or talking about political issues with friends). Yet, research by scholars who study higher education has long suggested that women experience a “chilly” climate on most campuses that systematically undermines their self-esteem.<sup>64–67</sup> Women enter college with higher levels of academic achievement, for example, but lower levels of perceived academic ability and intellectual self-confidence, as well as lower expectations for their own performance in college. The decline of girls’ self-esteem and self-confidence begins in adolescence.<sup>68–70</sup> Yet, rather than ameliorating this disparity between achievement and perception, the college experience exacerbates it—even for the highest-performing women students.<sup>71,72</sup> Once arrived on campus, women and men continue to enact sex-differentiated patterns established in elementary and high school, as women spend more time engaged in academic endeavors (studying), while men typically choose to pursue leisure activities (playing video games) instead.<sup>73</sup> Women are rewarded for this investment with higher levels of academic achievement.<sup>74</sup> Indeed, women earn higher grades than men even when men match them in the amount of time devoted to coursework.<sup>75</sup> Yet, gaps in the two sexes’ perceptions of their academic ability continue to widen.<sup>76</sup> Just as troubling, women enter college rating themselves lower than men on a number of measures of psychological well-being such as emotional health and stress levels. Women are also more likely than men to report feeling overwhelmed and being depressed. Again, rather than helping to close the distance

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between men and women, spending four years in college makes it worse.<sup>77</sup> Even after successful women college students become accomplished professionals, many continue to suffer from **imposter syndrome**—or the feeling that they are unqualified and undeserving of recognition. Imposter syndrome can be exacerbated for young women of color or for those with low socioeconomic status. Far more women than men attribute their success to luck than to their own talent and hard work.<sup>78</sup>

Sax and colleagues (2008) summarize recent findings on women and college experiences, noting that while women dominate enrollments and earn high grades, they are still underrepresented in traditionally male majors and careers, while reporting higher levels of stress and lower levels of academic self-confidence.<sup>79</sup> While the behaviors and orientations that produce these differences are established before students enter college, educational programs appear to “preserve and strengthen stereotyped differences in behavior, personality, aspirations and achievements.”<sup>80</sup>

Even when women and men have similar college experiences, the outcomes are often different. For example, the more time men students spend interacting with professors outside of the classroom, the more apt they are to embrace egalitarianism. Frustratingly, the exact opposite is true for women students—as those same interactions push them toward traditional gender roles. Challenging a professor in the classroom heightens women’s (but not men’s) self-reported anxiety. Similarly, when women students perceive that faculty members do not take their comments seriously, they are more likely than their men peers to experience an erosion of academic self-confidence and professional aspirations.<sup>81</sup> Yet, in campus climate studies, few women complain of overt sexism or describe the behavior of their professors or their fellow students as offensive. Many women claim that they are satisfied with their college experience and sometimes even claim that they have received preferential treatment from professors—which makes it difficult to attribute the outcomes described above to patterns of behavior that can be readily identified through survey research.

Yet, a student may claim to be satisfied with her educational experiences on a questionnaire but still report troubling incidents of “everyday sexism” when interviewed in person.<sup>82</sup> Research suggests that women regularly experience an array of **microaggressions**, indirect or subtle discriminations, grounded in objectification<sup>83</sup> and patronizing assumptions.<sup>84</sup> These include brief, commonplace comments or actions—a sexist joke here, a wolf-whistle there—that convey slights about women’s inherent abilities or convey criticisms when women fail to conform to



traditional gender roles.<sup>85,86</sup> Swim et al. (2004) conclude that college women are subjected to one or two such acts each week.<sup>87</sup> This constant presence of microaggressions helps to explain the erosion of academic self-confidence and psychological well-being throughout women's college careers, as microaggressions are linked to negative consequences such as stress, depression, anger, rage, and hopelessness.<sup>88</sup>

Moreover, it also helps to explain why women themselves fail to recognize and report a hostile campus climate, as microaggressions are intended to serve as subtle social sanctions. As such, they can be effective in encouraging women to question their own abilities and to accept their role as a helpmate to men relatives and professional colleagues in a patriarchal status quo. For example, when women are asked to recall a specific incident of objectification—even when they can accurately label and describe the incident as such—their acceptance of traditional gender norms increases and their willingness to engage in feminist social activism decreases.<sup>89</sup> It is likely that immersion in a chilly campus climate is not only the root cause of women's declining confidence and elevated stress levels during college but also erodes their political ambition.

Rather than identifying Welch's structural factors (access to education and professions) as the reason women avoid politics, Lawless and Fox (2010) point to traditional gender socialization as the culprit,<sup>90,91</sup> noting “[t]he pervasive influence of traditional gender socialization clearly might affect the cost-benefit calculus eligible candidates employ, but it has been largely disregarded.”<sup>92</sup> Their research identifies three aspects of gender socialization that still suppress women's nascent political ambition, including traditional family role orientations, a masculinized ethos, and a gendered psyche among eligible candidates.

## BOX 4.4: POLICY FEATURE

### Violence Against Women in Politics Worldwide

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Americanists have tended to focus on traditional gender socialization's effect on women, overlooking its effect on men. Yet, when explaining why patriarchy is inherently violent—and in particular why men overwhelmingly commit acts of violence—sociologist Allan G. Johnson (2014) notes “because violence is the most extreme instrument of control, then the capacity for

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violence—whether or not individual men actually make use of it—is central to the cultural definition of manhood.”<sup>93</sup> Traditional patriarchy positions men as heads of households, responsible (using violence if necessary) for ensuring that the women and children under their authority conform to prescribed roles.<sup>94</sup> As a result, patriarchy encourages men “to dismiss or not even to be aware of the needs and experiences of others, and to base moral decisions, including whether to use violence, solely on abstract notions of principle and dignity, honor and authority and ‘being in the right’ without also taking into account the consequences of what they do.”<sup>95</sup> Until this aspect of gender identity is dismantled, some men who embrace traditional definitions of masculinity will commit acts of violence against nonconforming women—and especially against women who step into public leadership roles. The tactic often works, as even just the perception that their neighborhoods are unsafe is enough to suppress women’s (but not men’s) civic engagement.<sup>96</sup>

U.S. policy focuses on helping women victims rather than changing men. Consider the **Violence Against Women Act** enacted in 1994. The legislation created an Office of Violence Against Women in the Department of Justice (DOJ). Along with the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), the DOJ awards tribal, state, and local grants, funding programs that help to provide a coordinated response (from courts, law enforcement, prosecutors, lawyers, and community organizations) to address domestic violence, child abuse, sexual assault, rape, and stalking. A provision of the bill, identifying sex-based crimes as hate crimes—thus enabling victims to seek civil rights remedies in federal court—was overturned by the Supreme Court in *U.S. v. Morrison*.<sup>97</sup> While successful in preventing violence and helping victims, reauthorization of the law became controversial in 2013 and 2018 over new provisions intended to help at-risk individuals, including Native American women (by permitting nontribal perpetrators to be prosecuted in tribal court), undocumented immigrant women (by increasing the number of visas available), and victims of sex trafficking (by mandating provision of reproductive health services), as well as LGBTQIA+ individuals (by prohibiting denial of remedial services or access to shelters). Another addition to the version of the 2018 reauthorization passed in the House of Representatives expanded law enforcement’s ability to restrict gun purchases by those convicted of domestic violence.

In the meantime, the U.S. #MeToo movement is revealing the extent of sexual harassment/assault and violent threats experienced by women candidates and public officials in the United States, as well as ways women are grappling with these incidents, either personally or via policy changes (see Chapters 5, 6, 7, and 8). Such violence is called **violence against women politicians (VAWP)**, and it occurs in many countries around the world. Violent acts against women candidates and politicians are frequent, as the Inter-Parliamentary Union’s 2016 survey of 55 women parliamentarians from 39 countries revealed that 82% of respondents reported being subjected to

psychological violence; 44% to threats of death, rape, kidnapping, or beatings targeting themselves or their children; 26% to direct physical violence; and 22% to sexual violence.<sup>98</sup> Recent events in Kenya are illustrative, as when four men forced Ann Kanyi, a primary candidate for the legislature, from her car at gunpoint<sup>99</sup> or when Elizabeth Manyala, an official from Nairobi County, was “smashed” into a wall by a man colleague when she refused to reallocate funds from the “county women’s caucus to one of his pet projects.”<sup>100</sup>

Scholars define VAWP as “1) aggressive acts aimed largely or solely at women in politics; 2) because they are women, often using gendered means of attack; and 3) with the goal of deterring their participation in order to preserve traditional gender roles and undermine democratic institutions.”<sup>101</sup> Acts that meet this definition, categorized in Table 4.2, include murder, kidnapping, or sexual assault (real or threatened), as well as pressuring women to resign their government posts and propagating rumors maligning their commitment to being wives and mothers or questioning their sexual morality. Physical and/or verbal intimidation is key, as the goal is to scare women into abandoning politics.

**Table 4.2 Categories of Violence Against Women in Politics**

Category of Violence	Definition	Example
Physical Violence	Bodily injuries inflicted upon women political actors or their families, including domestic abuse, beating, abduction, and assassination.	After being sworn in as her town’s first woman mayor, a Mexican politician was gunned down in her home in 2016.
Sexual Violence	Sexual acts and attempts at sexual acts by coercion, along with unwelcome sexual comments and advances. This includes sexual harassment, rape, and sexual exploitation.	In Sudan, women human-rights defenders have been sexually assaulted and told that they will be raped again if they continue their activities.
Psychological Violence	Hostile behavior and abuse intended to cause emotional damage to a person, including death and rape threats, stalking, character assassination, and social boycotts.	In Uganda, police stripped a woman opposition activist naked at a party rally in 2015, leaving her shocked and humiliated in front of men colleagues.

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Economic Violence	Degradation and coercion through control over access to economic resources	Local officials in Bolivia denied women—but not men—officeholders their salaries and expense reimbursements.
Symbolic Violence	Abuse and aggression in terms of false portrayals that seek to deny women's competence as political actors.	Highly sexualized images of women politicians are found easily via Google.

Source: Krook, Mona Lena. "Violence Against Women in Politics." *Journal of Democracy* 28:1 (2017), 79–81. © 2017 National Endowment for Democracy and Johns Hopkins University Press. Reprinted with permission of Johns Hopkins University Press.

Sometimes violence against women occurs as backlash against an increasing number of women in politics. Reforms to increase the number of women in politics, such as quotas (see Chapter 6), make women a "key voting demographic," as well as more visible, powerful politicians.<sup>102</sup> Some men believe that women's newfound public positions detract from their own power, while others (men and women alike) think women should not be in public life at all. Such beliefs contribute to violent attacks—as in a 2015 bombing in Afghanistan that killed Angiza Shinwari, a provincial council member and defender of women's rights, who exacerbated fundamentalists' ire by refusing full body covering in favor of a face covering (*niqab*).<sup>103</sup> Contextual variables also contribute to violence against women politicians. In countries already rife with political and social violence, for example, violent crimes targeting women are also apt to go unprosecuted. Advanced democracies are not immune. In 2018, Jess Phillips, a feminist member of the U.K. parliament, received at least 600 rape threats (via Twitter) in one night; in 2017, French candidate Nathalie Kosciusko-Morizet was attacked while campaigning in Paris.<sup>104</sup>

Solutions to VAWP range from media campaigns to new laws. The #NotTheCost campaign, emphasizing "violence is NOT the cost of politics," was started in 2016 by the National Democratic Institute (NDI)—a nonprofit, nonpartisan nongovernmental organization that supports democracy worldwide. The #NotTheCost hashtag is used almost every day to publicly denounce violence against women in politics. For example, @Farida\_N tweeted, "When someone tells me women shouldn't get involved in politics because it is too violent for them, I tell them men should stay away from politics because they are too violent for it. #africansrising #notthecost." Meanwhile, political parties can establish zero-tolerance policies and refuse to support perpetrators, while states can establish commissions to track violence or pass laws penalizing those who commit violent acts.<sup>105</sup>

The difficulty of suppressing VAWP is illustrated by Bolivia—which has a *machismo* culture, rife with violence against women, along with quotas that have yielded parity among men and women in its national legislature and city councils. Bolivia became the first country to pass a law prohibiting such violence in 2012. Efforts to enact this legislation took over a decade, as women legislators first gathered to discuss the problem in 2000, with a policymaking initiative launched by the Bolivian Association of Councilwomen (*La Asociación de Concejalas de Bolivia*) shortly thereafter.<sup>106</sup> Similar legislation has been considered in Costa Rica, Ecuador, Mexico, and Peru. Even so, as of 2018, no Bolivian perpetrators have been convicted. According to the Association of Bolivian Councilwomen, 70 complaints were filed in just the first six months of 2018—more than the 64 filed in 2017 or 65 in 2017.<sup>107</sup> Some Bolivian women were locked in or out of their offices for days, while others were beaten. In a particularly egregious incident, one pregnant councilwoman was kicked so hard that she miscarried.<sup>108</sup> Despite legislation, failure to change Bolivians' definition of masculinity makes it difficult to check these ongoing violent attacks against women politicians.

## TRADITIONAL FAMILY ROLE ORIENTATIONS

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As described in Chapters 2 and 3, associating women with domestic responsibilities has deep roots in the United States. Women were excluded from the public sphere first because they were deemed inherently unqualified for such participation and second because most people thought such participation would undermine society's stability. These conclusions were based on assumptions about women's natural ability and character. Women's supposed inability to engage in reason and their overly passionate natures justified somber male guidance, while their physical weakness necessitated men's provision and protection.<sup>109</sup> Beyond their inability to meet the criteria for full citizenship, women were also associated with an uncontrollable craving for all forms of self-gratification, so much so that their participation in the public sphere would result in chaos and corruption. Hence women who attempted to be active in public life were perceived not only as inappropriate individuals, reaching beyond their limited abilities, but as a threat that could inspire other women to misbehave, thus undermining society's fragile stability with their craven demands in the public sphere. Such unfortunate outcomes could be avoided if women were guided into their natural role as submissive helpmates within the domestic sphere, where they could be encouraged to direct their passionate nature into fiercely protecting their children and fulfilling the needs of their families rather than their own grasping ambitions. Indeed, patriarchy defines masculinity, in large part, as the ability to successfully control wives and daughters, ensuring that they conform to these gender appropriate roles.<sup>110</sup>

It is important to recognize the weight of this history. None of our civic, political, and economic institutions evolved to accommodate women, along with their unique lived experiences or even with cisgender women's distinct biological functions. These institutions also evolved with the expectation that men would be "ideal workers"—able to dedicate all of their time to civic, political, and economic endeavors—because they were expected to off-load all of their domestic responsibilities onto their mothers, wives, and daughters (along with servants, serfs, and slaves if available). Even now, our civic, political, and economic institutions make little-to-no accommodation for those who cannot be "ideal workers" (fully able, young, healthy, straight men with no domestic responsibilities).

When women first entered the workforce, they were expected to manage their households, a phenomenon that resulted in women—especially married, heterosexual women with children—putting in a "second shift" at home, after the workday ended.<sup>111</sup> Many assumed, however, that women's participation in the workforce would eventually result in a more equitable distribution of household chores and child care. Yet, revisiting time diaries of working women in traditional marriages over time reveals how little has changed.<sup>112</sup> Women as of 2018 do less household labor than their mothers and grandmothers (down from 32 hours per week in the 1960s to 18 hours per week by 2013), whereas men are doing more than their fathers and grandfathers (up from 4 hours to 10 across the same time span). Yet, women are more apt to undertake boring, rote chores (such as laundry, food prep, and clean up) that need to be performed day in and day out. On an average day in 2017, 19% of men did this type of housework, compared with 49% of women. Meanwhile, 46% of men did food preparation or cleanup, compared with 69% of women. The percentage of men on "kitchen duty" has increased 11 points from 2003 to 2017.<sup>113,114</sup> Yet, the slow pace of change means that women still do far more household labor than men, even when they are working full time.

This pattern becomes even more dramatic when heterosexual couples have children. When both partners work, women still perform 65% of the family's child-care responsibilities and are 2.5 times more likely than their husbands to care for their children in the middle of the night. Women are also overwhelmingly responsible for the myriad tasks associated with managing a busy household—coordinating calendars, filling out forms, managing doctors' appointments, hiring babysitters, remembering to restock household items, and so on—termed **invisible labor** by social scientists.<sup>115</sup> The gendered expectations of parenting are so entrenched that working women still spend more time on child care, even when their husbands do not work.<sup>116–118</sup>

The small number of women who already have nascent political ambition are willing to juggle family and child care responsibilities to pursue a political career, just as they do to pursue any other profession.<sup>119</sup> But a 2011 study found that likely women candidates were more apt than men to be single, separated, or divorced, less apt to have children, and less apt to have children still living at home. In addition, they are willing to multitask their way through hectic days, as 43% of these

women claimed that they were responsible for the majority of household tasks, compared to only 7% of men. Similarly, 60% of women reported being responsible for the majority of childcare responsibilities, compared to only 6% of men. And, while some women are willing to campaign under such circumstances, prioritizing family responsibilities likely keeps many other women from developing an interest in electoral politics in the first place. Indeed, more women run for state legislative seats when living nearby the state capital, which makes juggling family and professional demands easier, and undergraduate women in an experimental design weighed proximity to home twice as much as men students when asked to decide whether to run for a hypothetical elected position.<sup>120</sup>

Young women and men have claimed to support egalitarian relationships—where no partner does more than 60% or less than 40% of domestic work—for decades.<sup>121</sup> But when specifically asked, young men anticipated doing less housework and parenting than their young women partners. Although young men generally agreed that either partner could work full time after having children, they personally expected to be employed full time for their entire careers. Meanwhile, even though they preferred egalitarian relationships, young women anticipate doing significantly more housework than their husbands and to be the ones to interrupt their careers for children.<sup>122–126</sup>

Moreover, as discussed in Chapter 3, even abstract support for egalitarian marriages among 18- to 25-year-olds has declined over the past 20 years, as embracing equal partnerships grew steadily from the 1970s up through the mid-1990s but then fell. In 1994, only 16% of young adults agreed with the statement that a woman's place is in the home, compared to 25% in 2014. Across this same time period, those agreeing that husbands should make all the important decisions for a family grew 10%, from 30% to 40%.<sup>127</sup> This decline in support for egalitarian gender roles is occurring in part because the percentage of Latinx young people in the population is increasing. Latinx young people—especially young men—are more inclined than other demographic groups to prefer traditional family arrangements. Similarly, young African Americans are less apt to embrace egalitarian gender roles than white millennials.<sup>128</sup>

Attitudes toward egalitarian family structures also shift after couples have children. Only 35% of employed millennial men (those born between 1981 and 1996) without children thought that men should be traditional breadwinners, compared to 53% of those with children. Similarly, 24% of college-educated young men in 2015 anticipated taking on substantial child care duties, but only 8% of those with children actually followed through.<sup>129</sup> Sociologists believe millennials are reverting to traditional parenting roles and to gender essentialism to explain those choices as a way to avoid feeling bad when lack of family friendly policies (paid sick, parental, and vacation leave, along with subsidized child care) make it hard to live up to their ideals. Hence, they focus on the notion that women have choices but prefer to take time off or to pursue more flexible careers because they are “naturally” more nurturing.<sup>130,131</sup> Notably, however, broad public support

for egalitarian partnerships has continued to rise in some European countries, where family leave policies are more generous and child care more affordable.<sup>132</sup>

Patterns among same-sex partners in the United States provide further evidence that public policy affects family structures. Prior to having children, same-sex couples divide chores more equally. After having children, however, one partner often transitions to the breadwinner role, while the other often takes on more responsibility for household chores and child care—in large part because the workplace still rewards ideal workers unconstrained by domestic responsibility.<sup>133</sup> Claims of gender essentialism, that heterosexual women voluntarily choose to take on domestic roles because it comes naturally, are undermined by the fact that heterosexual women are far less satisfied with this arrangement than gay and lesbian partners—likely because heterosexual husbands assume that if anyone stays home or makes career sacrifices, it will be their wives. Meanwhile this “deal” must be more explicitly negotiated among other types of couples.<sup>134–136</sup>

It is important to recognize that as of 2018 both men and women claim to want partners and families. Men high school students are only slightly less likely to aspire to marriage (at 79%) than women high school students (at 84%). But both sexes are equally likely to want children (at about 70%), to earn a lot of money (at about 85%), and to be successful at their jobs (at 96%).<sup>137</sup> Yet, young heterosexual women who envision men partners in this future scenario are not naïve about the work achieving their goals will entail. While young women prefer egalitarian relationships, they know from observing men and women all around them in everyday life that they will likely work far harder to care for their households and children than their husbands.

Young women consciously factor these responsibilities into their life choices. They intuitively act on the insight explicitly offered by Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg when she advised, “You can’t have it all at once.”<sup>138</sup> Hence, the one shift in mass behavior that women overwhelmingly have embraced since the 1960s is to purposefully delay marriage and childbirth. By 2009, the proportion of American women who were married dropped below 50%, while the average age at the time of first marriages rose dramatically to 27, up from only 20 in the 1950s. Fertility rates among millennial women dropped to a record low of 60.2 births per 1,000 women of childbearing age in 2017. On average, women had 1.8 children, which is shy of the 2.1 children per woman required to replace the current U.S. population. When asked, women explain that they are having fewer children in part because affordable high-quality childcare is not available and in part because they are purposefully delaying the responsibilities that come with marriage and family until they have established careers.<sup>139</sup> Interestingly, Susan B. Anthony, in a speech titled *The Homes of Single Women*, predicted a stage when women would use their newfound freedom and economic power to avoid marriage before equality among the sexes would be achieved. She argued that “long existing customs and laws” would affect the behavior of even well-intentioned men, and that these domestic patterns would not change until women purposefully chose to remain single.



Her prediction that this reluctance to marry would result in change may be coming true. The same pattern of delayed marriage and fewer children is happening in other countries, especially in those where women have the greatest difficulty achieving work-life balance. These patterns have even started playing out in the socially conservative countries of West Africa, where women with access to education and employment are not only delaying marriage and family but also shifting cultural norms resulting in women seeking divorces when their marriages are not based on affection between partners.<sup>140</sup>

Until more change occurs, however, women's ongoing obligations in the private sphere force them to undergo a careful juggling act and to consider whether and when to have children. This balancing act not only helps to explain the drop in fertility rates, but it is almost certainly responsible for women's failure to break through glass ceilings in the workplace, as well as for their low levels of nascent political ambition.<sup>141,142</sup>

## THE MASCULINIZED ETHOS OF POLITICS

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Part of the reason it has been so difficult to shift responsibility for household chores and childcare is that stereotypes about masculinity and femininity have been difficult to displace. Despite repeated waves of social movement activism, many Americans still embrace binary sex categories connected to distinct, gendered traits. The ideal “**agentic male**” makes decisions and takes action, while the ideal “**communal female**” is supportive, other-oriented, and nurturing. Most importantly, she is not ambitious but willingly serves as a resource for others' aspirations. Such stereotyped thinking is persistent. In 2017, for example, Pew Research Center conducted a national survey where Americans across the nation were asked to describe the traits they think society associates with men and women, as well as whether these associations were positive or negative. Researchers found that Americans are much more likely to use the adjective “powerful” to describe men in a positive way (67% positive), while this description had negative connotations for women (92% negative). Similarly, the words “compassionate” and “caring” were positively associated with women but viewed negatively when linked to men. Americans thought that “leadership” and “ambition” are traits that society values more in men, while women were positively associated with “kindness” and “responsibility.”<sup>143</sup>

The enforced division of labor over the past 7,000 years means that the domestic sphere still has a traditionally **feminine ethos**, where women are expected to excel precisely because they are “naturally” communal and other-oriented. Similarly, the public sphere—and in particular the hyper-masculine sphere of politics—has a traditionally **masculine ethos**, where men are expected to excel because they are “naturally” ambitious and agentic leaders. People expect politics to be a competitive, rough and tumble man's world—and these expectations tend to become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Many aspects of public office involve listening

to others, finding consensus, and solving problems to help other people. But few people emphasize these aspects of the job—choosing instead to highlight competition and conflict. Politicians adopt the language of warfare (using phrases such as waging campaigns, developing strategies and tactics, or mobilizing their foot soldiers) to describe running for office. These metaphors are often repeated by journalists and media pundits—who typically only set aside battle imagery when they use the metaphor of a competitive horse race (who’s ahead and who’s fallen behind) in their campaign reporting. Similarly, legislative debates are described as battles with winners and losers, when they could be described as deliberation to identify the best solutions for society’s shared concerns. Even coverage of politics within party caucuses emphasize conflict, power, and authority—as majority and minority leaders “whip” the votes to build support for their legislative agendas when their efforts could be described as persuading colleagues. Given this masculine ethos, political leadership is still strongly associated with men, and women are often inherently viewed as ill-equipped intruders when they become involved in politics.<sup>144–148</sup>

One major consequence of politics’ masculine ethos is that women—from the time they are young girls throughout their adult lives—are rarely encouraged to participate in traditional political activities or to run for office. Parents and families are the primary agents of political socialization, giving them great influence over young people’s political identities, attitudes, and behaviors. Indeed, the biographies of successful women politicians and political activists often relay anecdotes of atypical fathers who encouraged their daughters’ political interests. It comes as no surprise that people of both sexes are much more likely to think about running for political office if their parents have encouraged them. Yet, even as late as 2013, men college students were more likely (at 40%) to report being encouraged to run for office by their parents than women college students (at only 29%). This pattern holds true for other significant adults in their lives, including other family members, teachers, coaches, religious leaders, and friends.<sup>149</sup>

Similarly, adult women are less likely than men to be encouraged to run for office by their family, friends, and colleagues or to be recruited to run by party officials, elected officials, or activists—even when they have experiences, professions, and civic activism typically associated with political careers.<sup>150</sup> Notably, these patterns held in all of Lawless’s and Fox’s repeated surveys from 2005 to 2012 about the emergence of nascent political ambition among likely political candidates.<sup>151–153</sup> Fewer women than men were asked to run for office, despite the fact that more women’s organizations dedicated to recruiting women (albeit primarily Democratic women) to run for office emerged while they were conducting their research.<sup>154</sup>

Women are less likely than men to be “self-starters” and more likely to run only after being encouraged.<sup>155</sup> Yet, women respond just as positively as men when they are asked, suggesting that nascent political ambition can be cultivated through such requests.<sup>156–158</sup> Currently, however, when people think of politicians, they think of men engaged in hypermasculine endeavors. Unfortunately, more

work must be done to dispel the masculine ethos surrounding politics before it will occur to people—from parents and family members to friends, colleagues, and political actors—to ask more women to run.

## WOMEN'S GENDERED PSYCHE

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The combined effect of traditional gender roles and gendered spheres of activity not only affects broader society but also the internal identities, attitudes, and choices of girls and women. In short, the masculinized ethos of traditional political endeavors leads people to believe that politicians are focused on wielding power over others and are mired in conflict. Hence, women and girls see politics as a masculine endeavor and learn to think that they should avoid traditional political participation.<sup>159</sup>

Even now, many people, including both men and women, still expect women to exemplify the idealized traits of the communal female. Many women still internalize expectations that they be communal, nurturing, and other-oriented. The benevolent nature of many of the prescriptive stereotypes used to confine women to the domestic sphere and to nurturing roles have made this tendency a particularly troublesome gender trap for women to overcome. Unlike the stereotypes used to justify oppressing other minority groups, the attributes that constrain women sound quite positive—leading some to describe this form of sexism as **sugar-coated oppression**. Girls and women who demonstrate nurturing, self-sacrificing characteristics are praised and upheld as exemplary. Members of other marginalized groups often try to overcome negative beliefs by becoming “model minorities” and working hard to contradict assumptions about their inherent abilities and traits. While stressful and unfair to the individuals involved, this strategy can be effective when minorities positively exceed negative stereotypes. When women adopt this strategy by acting agentic, self-promoting, ambitious, and forceful, it can backfire because women are often seen as violating “positive” stereotypes—and thus undermining the reasons why society has placed women on a pedestal. Hence, agentic women often are intensely disliked. A more intense, misogynist reaction is to dehumanize such women as unnatural and deserving of punishment, up to and including threats and violence.

Those who strongly embrace traditional gender roles are apt to have the most intense, negative reactions to women who violate their expectations. This dynamic is labeled **ambivalent sexism** because it combines **benevolent sexism** and **hostile sexism**, and it explains the paradox of how those who cling to traditional gender norms can simultaneously claim that they love and admire (appropriately behaved) women while harshly sanctioning those who dare violate the natural order by rejecting traditional gender roles.<sup>160</sup>

As discussed elsewhere in the book, those with hostile sexist attitudes often mistrust women's motives and see men and women in a zero-sum game for power.

On social science surveys, they are apt to agree with the claims like, “many women get a kick out of teasing by seeming sexually available and then refusing advances,” or “most women interpret innocent remarks or acts as being sexist.” Those with benevolent sexist attitudes, on the other hand, will agree with statements such as “Women should be cherished and protected by men,” or “Women, compared to men, tend to have a superior moral sensibility.” According to psychologist Peter Glick, these attitudes create a reinforcing cycle, where society assumes that the only women who are mistreated are those who violate expectations of appropriate feminine behavior—and deserve it. He notes that the basic agreement of ambivalent sexism is that women will cater to men’s needs, so that men will cherish and protect them in return. In the most patriarchal cultures, where women have less access to education and economic independence, women are more inclined to go along. Indeed, under such circumstances, women are more likely to embrace benevolent sexism than men.<sup>161</sup>

For girls and women, the risk of social sanction and being disliked is amplified not only by lack of resources but by the fact that they typically have close, intimate relationships (as parents, daughters, friends, spouses, and lovers) with boys and men who benefit from their subordinate status. In the 2014 book *The Gender Knot*, sociologist Allan G. Johnson notes that patterns of oppression seem the most normal when dominant and subordinate groups interact in close, interdependent ways.<sup>162</sup> He concludes,

As a result, the path of least resistance is to experience patriarchy as normal, consensual, and serving everyone’s needs and values. It should not surprise us, then, to find no shortage of women who seem to accept their lot, and not a few who do their part to keep it going in the “natural order” of things.<sup>163</sup>

Similarly, social psychologist Laurie A. Rudman (2005), who studies benevolent sexism, describes why there are not more out-right misogynists, as well as why it is so difficult for women to reject the role of the communal female.<sup>164</sup> She notes, “It is simply not feasible for men to be overtly hostile to women, on whom they depend for a variety of services, including sexual gratification, emotional intimacy, child raising and domestic labor. Similarly, women depend on men for romantic love, economic stability, and social prestige. Thus, one could hardly invent a stronger context in which dominant and subordinate groups are equally invested in preserving the status quo.”<sup>165</sup> However, note, just as Susan B. Anthony predicted, women’s advances over the past several decades emerged as they became less dependent on men for romantic love, economic stability, and social prestige.

Cultural myths surrounding romance are one of the ways society perpetuates women’s subordinate status. When women idealize traditional romance and being protected by chivalrous men, they become less interested in seeking prestigious

careers for themselves and more willing to invest in their male partner's economic success. In a nod to Cinderella and Prince Charming, social psychologists refer to this phenomenon as the **glass slipper effect**.<sup>166</sup>

To the extent that women themselves co-opt their own empowerment by internalizing such identities, it can be difficult for them to identify and advocate for their own best interests in the public sphere.<sup>167</sup> Political theorists initially raised these very same concerns not with regard to women but the lower classes. In 1859, John Stewart Mill argued that the habit of deferring to the aristocracy should play no role in a modern democracy, as the practice would encourage those from the lower classes to moderate their demands and to “desire nothing strongly.”<sup>168</sup> Echoing John Stuart Mill's concerns that British commoners who knew their place would be incapable of fully recognizing their own self-interests, some feminist scholars fear the same pattern can make it difficult for women to identify and voice their legitimate political concerns. They note, for example, that women have been and still are socialized to be more polite than men.<sup>169–172</sup> According to the seminal work on sex and politeness by Robin T. Lakoff (1972), “Little girls were indeed taught to talk like little ladies, in that their speech is in many ways more polite than that of boys or men, and the reason for this is that politeness involves an absence of strong statement, and women's speech is devised to prevent the expression of strong statements.”<sup>173</sup> The absence of strong preferences is essential if women are expected to be a resource for others' agendas rather than their own. Of course, not all women modify their preferences, speech, or activities accordingly, but those who do not risk being disliked and subjected to social sanction as a result.

Not only are girls and women socialized to avoid advocating for their own interests, they are more prone than others to prioritize social harmony over political participation, often choosing to avoid face-to-face conflict and political disagreement within their interpersonal networks altogether.<sup>174,175</sup> Given that people discussing public affairs will almost inevitably disagree with one another at some point over some issues, perhaps it should not be surprising that women are also far less likely than men to participate in political activities that require them to persuade others,<sup>176–178</sup> and they avoid conflict-laden activities, like debates, protests, and partisan disagreements.<sup>179</sup> Women are more likely than men to have conflict-avoidant personality traits, which reduces political participation.<sup>180–182</sup> Hence, women often see themselves as the type of people who should not participate fully in the public sphere, especially when that participation requires them to fight about contested political issues or to debate wicked, divisive issues in their communities.<sup>183</sup>

As noted in Box 4.2, women are generally inclined to underestimate their intelligence, experiences, and abilities—especially in traditionally male-dominated endeavors. This tendency follows them into the electoral arena. When Lawless and Fox questioned people with professional experiences linked to political careers, for example, women were more than twice as likely (at 28%) to claim that they were not at all qualified to run for office compared to men (at 12%).<sup>184</sup>

Men (at 26%), on the other hand, were nearly twice as likely as women (at 14%) to claim that they were very qualified.<sup>185</sup> These same women were less likely than their men counterparts to believe that they knew about public policy issues and had relevant professional experience—or that they were good public speakers, fundraisers, or self-promoters.<sup>186</sup> Women's self-effacing claims about their abilities had already taken root by the time women entered college. When Lawless and Fox asked college students whether they would know enough to run for political office after finishing school and working a while, just over half of young women said no, while only one third of young men doubted themselves.<sup>187</sup> Meanwhile, nearly a quarter of young men confidently anticipated future competence, compared to only about one tenth of young women.<sup>188</sup>

Even when women believe they are just as professionally accomplished and qualified as their men colleagues, many have serious doubts about whether they have the character traits required to withstand the conflict, rudeness, and negative attacks of professional politics.<sup>189</sup> Women are less apt than men to describe themselves as competitive, risk-taking, entrepreneurial, and, perhaps most important of all for a political career, as thick-skinned. They recognize the importance of these traits for candidates willing to enter the fray of electoral campaigns, which convinces many that even if they would be good public servants, they just are not cut out to run for office.<sup>190,191</sup> An even more discouraging finding is that women often believe that they will face sexism and misogyny on the campaign trail and after winning elections—which convinces them that they will need to be more experienced, more qualified, and will need to work twice as hard as their men peers in order to win elections and to have a successful political career.<sup>192</sup> Until the masculine ethos of the political sphere changes, or political socialization and lived experiences transform women's gendered psyche, women will be less likely to want to run for office than men, even when they are highly qualified to do so.

## **Solving Women's Political Ambition Dilemma— Liberal Versus Radical Feminist Solutions**

Scholars have embraced both liberal and radical feminist, including intersectional, solutions to this dilemma. Some have continued to focus on reforms grounded in liberal feminism, which emphasize more women gaining access to the political sphere rather than changing it to accommodate women. Since girls' and women's political socialization cultivates a gendered psyche, they believe efforts should be made to eliminate differences in men's and women's political socialization. The goal is to bolster experiences that better prepare women to participate in explicitly political environments.

Those adopting this approach, for example, have emphasized that the gap in political ambition could be closed if more parents encouraged their daughters, as well as their sons, to consider a career in politics. They also point out that fewer girls than boys play competitive sports. Yet, playing competitive sports encourages



girls to prioritize winning, respond to aggression, and take risk—which are all traits associated with successful politicians.

Other recommendations for bolstering young women’s political interest and efficacy are to make sure that they continue to have experiences associated with political ambition in young men, including taking political science courses, discussing politics with friends and family members, and seeking out political information in the media.<sup>193</sup>

Making women’s experiences more similar to men’s assumes that they will evoke similar reactions from women; yet as Box 4.2 indicates, men’s and women’s distinct reactions in college make it clear that convergence does not always occur even when both sexes have similar experiences. If political science courses and media sources are male-coded public spaces and emphasize the masculine ethos of politics, increasing women’s exposure to them may also increase exposure to microaggression and social sanctions, reinforcing women’s sense that they do not belong. Such experiences may suppress women’s political ambition instead of cultivating it. Hence, other scholars and reformers adopt a radical feminist approach and recommend changing the public sphere instead of changing women.

These scholars point out that given women’s historic exclusion from the public sphere, researchers’ descriptions of men’s political behavior became the “standard” or the “norm” by which others are evaluated. When women make different choices, they are deemed deficient or abnormal in comparison.<sup>194,195</sup> In response, some political scientists have argued that “rather than focus on the individual as the thing that needs fixing—more motivation, higher resources, stronger democratic values—a higher level of scrutiny should be directed at the institutions and practice of the democratic system itself.”<sup>196</sup>

The differences that more women would bring to political office may be good for democratic government. As Susan J. Carroll and Kira Sanbonmatsu (2013) demonstrate in their book *More Women Can Run*, women typically develop



► **Photo 4.4** Women who play competitive sports cultivate traits that help them run for office.

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political ambition differently than most men.<sup>197</sup> Women are more apt than men to consider the effects of their decisions on other people and especially on those close to them. This trait—which has also been found to differentiate women’s moral reasoning and leadership decisions from men’s—is grounded in women’s socialization to be other-oriented, as well as in many women’s lived experiences as primary caregivers for children, spouses, and elderly relatives. This **Relationally-Embedded Model** of decision-making extends to the decisions they make about political participation. Hence, women’s political ambition is often cultivated when people in their lives encourage them to run.<sup>198</sup> When Carroll and Sanbonmatsu (2013) conducted a survey of state legislators, for example, they found that 42.7% of men legislators said it was entirely their own idea to run, compared to only 26.4% of women legislators.<sup>199</sup> Beyond being asked, these women also overwhelmingly attribute their decision to run not to a longstanding desire to be involved in politics but to concern over public policy issues that affect people’s lives.<sup>200</sup>

Research shows that women’s low tolerance for interpersonal conflict reduces their willingness to pursue careers—including political careers—associated with power-related goals such as self-promotion and competition. To the contrary, women are attracted to careers that fulfill communal goals such as solving problems and helping others. Yet, the masculine ethos of politics was socially constructed and has become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Elected officials do not spend all of their time fighting with people. They spend considerable time on communal tasks—like helping constituents, meeting with community members, and collaborating with others to draft effective policies that solve problems and improve people’s lives. If stories about these aspects of public service replaced war metaphors and conflict narratives, politics could have a feminine ethos that attracts rather than repels women. An experimental design with college students as subjects demonstrated that emphasizing the communal aspects of public life does substantially narrow the sex-based gap in political ambition.<sup>201</sup> Further, if more women were elected to office, narratives that bolster politics’ feminine ethos could also become self-fulfilling, as women politicians do actually spend more time than men on communal tasks.<sup>202,203</sup>

Women’s avoidance of conflict can be seen as a deficiency that needs to be “fixed” before women will run for office; however, it may be the case that conflict should be seen as less central to the political process. Given voter complaints about partisan polarization and legislative gridlock, willingness to listen, negotiate, and compromise instead could also be considered positive attributes that more men politicians should emulate. Studies of interpersonal communication show that women avoid interpersonal conflict by being more polite than men—and that their politeness can facilitate **exploratory talk**—where people construct shared meanings as they develop ideas. Polite interactions are characterized by soliciting others’ opinions, qualifying one’s claims, providing supportive feedback, acknowledging others’ contributions, and avoiding confrontation. All of these conversational patterns encourage collaboration and are especially useful

in deliberation.<sup>204</sup> On the contrary, interactions characterized by challenges, disagreements, and interruptions lead to entrenched positions, especially when these tactics are used in a public.<sup>205,206</sup> “Those attacked often respond defensively, and little progress is made in exploring the issues and ideas proposed.”<sup>207</sup>

It should come as no surprise that women’s involvement in decision-making processes can increase a group’s capacity for decision-making by improving cooperation and increasing understanding of complex issues. Such efforts are more apt to lead to innovative solutions to public problems—often labeled win-win or third way solutions—that are unlikely to be developed during a heated debate between entrenched opponents.<sup>208</sup> Research on the composition of deliberative groups suggests that more inclusive processes and more empathetic policy recommendations result when women deliberate exclusively with other women and even when group composition substantially favors women.<sup>209</sup>

Transforming electoral politics is important because, “mitigating the effects of gendered institutions is not only better for the women who otherwise get shut out of the democratic process, but is better for the health of democracy as a whole.”<sup>210</sup> Yet, the dilemma remains: How will a male-coded public space be transformed into to a gender-neutral or female-coded public space unless enough women’s political socialization better prepares more of them to participate in contemporary politics, despite its masculine ethos? As Box 4.5 on the phenomenon of backlash notes, relying on a gradual erosion of traditional gender roles over time has not been a reliable strategy to improve the status of women.

## BOX 4.5: BACKLASH AND THE RESURGENCE OF TRADITIONAL GENDER ROLES

Progress in overcoming the public sphere’s masculine ethos and women’s gendered psyche is not inevitable. Binary sex categories and associated gender roles are constructed, and when perceived as useful, they can be resurrected in different eras. Indeed, a backlash against egalitarian roles often takes place immediately after women have made significant strides in achieving equality. U.S. women’s experiences during and after World War II serve as a poignant example. The United States had done little to prepare for participation in another war. When working-age men were drafted, too few men laborers were left behind—not only to sustain the economy but to build the planes, tanks, and munitions that the military needed. During the war, 6.5 million women joined the labor force to take

*(Continued)*

(Continued)

their place. As a result, society embraced a tomboyish version of womanhood, celebrating confident, independent women who wore overalls, tucked their hair in bandannas, rolled up their sleeves, and went to work. This ideal woman was epitomized by Rosie the Riveter, part of a media campaign to entice more women into the paid workforce, described in Chapter 2 and highlighted in the Preface and cover of this book. These women often had young children, and the government responded to the problem of unsupervised children in the home by supporting federally subsidized daycare centers across the nation. After the war ended, the Child Welfare League of America, along with prominent child welfare advocates like Eleanor Roosevelt, tried to keep the centers open. But public sentiment about the value of women in the workplace shifted. Some of this concern focused on making space for returning soldiers in the workplace. Yet, as historian Elaine Tyler May (1988) notes, postwar anxieties about the rise of communism were linked to unconventional lifestyles and to sex outside of marriage.<sup>211</sup> White women in the burgeoning middle class were once again encouraged to embrace early marriage, child care, and domesticity, and subsidized child care centers were shuttered. Fashion became more restrictive, with a return of skirts and heels that confined women's gait. And, despite increasing access to time-saving household appliances like washing machines and vacuum cleaners, domestic routines became more complex as a way to consume more of women's time.<sup>212</sup> Ironically, women's diminished opportunities and status set the stage for activism in coming decades. "The stuffing of middle class American women back into the box of early marital expectation and domestic confinement—a box that chafed all the more thanks to the revolutionary opportunities that had too recently been made available to their mothers and grandmothers—by the 1960s had created a world so airless that it was nearly destined to combust more forcefully than ever before."<sup>213</sup> Journalist Susan Faludi (1991) argued that a similar, although less effective, backlash occurred in the 1980s, with a spate of prominent media stories inaccurately describing educated, working women as unlikely to marry, unhappy, and unfulfilled.<sup>214</sup>

The phenomenon is not restricted to the United States, nor to the dustbin of history, as backlash against women's progress is currently playing out in both China and Saudi Arabia. In China, the Communist Party has responded to a sluggish economy, a shrinking population—and concern that educated women would exacerbate the lull in fertility by rejecting marriage and children in favor of careers—by purposefully socializing women to embrace restrictive gender roles celebrated in traditional Chinese culture. At Shenjiang College, under the guise of preparing women for upcoming job interviews, the All-China Women's

Federation instructs women students on comportment, including how to pour tea, sit demurely, dress appropriately, and adopt a “sunny” demeanor.

“According to traditional culture, women should be modest and tender, and men’s role is working outside and providing for the family,” one 21-year-old student told a reporter from *The Washington Post*. While waiting for a class on tea ceremonies to begin, she also said, “I want to be a model for my children.” Similarly, a company in Northern China operates a “traditional culture school” where women are told to focus on wifely virtues, to defer to their husbands, and no matter what, not to get divorced! Notably, there are no comparable courses targeting young men.<sup>215</sup>

Meanwhile, the backlash in Saudi Arabia is more coercive. The current crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman, has recently acceded to women’s rights activists’ decades long push for equality by granting women the right to drive. At the same time, however, these same activists—many of whom staged illegal driving protests decades ago—have been arrested under charges that they are traitors who threaten national security and deserve the death penalty (see Chapters 8 and 9). In both countries, it remains to be seen whether repression of women after recent gains will inspire future activism or whether women’s progress will be curtailed.<sup>216,217</sup>

## CONCLUSION

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Over the past several decades, cultivating political ambition has become the Holy Grail of scholars and activists who believe patriarchal legacies cannot be completely addressed until women are more fully represented in government. Research consistently shows that when American women run, they are just as likely to win as men. This is a topic we turn to in Chapter 5. The problem is that even after gaining access to higher education and professional careers typically associated with political aspirations, many women are still reluctant to run for office. Liberal feminists’ emphasis on converging men’s and women’s experiences did not take the tenacity of traditional gender socialization, and its ability to produce gendered psyches among both men and women, into account, nor did they anticipate that women would continue to find the masculine ethos of politics alienating.

It remains to be seen whether the sharp uptick in the number of women who ran in the 2018 midterm elections will provide the “jolt” to the system that Lawless and Fox (2014) recently claimed was needed to upend the long-term factors that have suppressed American women’s political ambition—and their representation among elected public servants—for so long.<sup>218</sup> This possibility is addressed more fully in Chapter 5, which explores women’s experiences as candidates.

## REVIEW QUESTIONS

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1. Political scientists have identified three main influences on the number of women who run for office—institutional, cultural, and individual factors. Which of these three factors do you think has the greatest influence on the number of women willing to serve in public office? Why?
2. What is the difference between nascent and expressed political ambition? Why did Americanist scholars who study candidate emergence need to develop a difference between these two aspects of political ambition?
3. Why did Second Wave scholars believe the convergence of men's and women's educational and professional experiences would close the gap between men's and women's participation and ambition? Why did their predicted outcomes fail to occur?
4. How are “chilly” campus climates for women related to the erosion of women's self confidence in their academic and intellectual ability, as well as in the emergence of the imposter syndrome?
5. How do benevolent and hostile sexism work in tandem to constrain women's ability to step into political leadership roles? How are the concepts of sugar-coated oppression and the glass-slipper effect related to benevolent sexism?
6. Can the Relationally-Embedded Model of Decision Making, which describes the way many women make political decisions, help to develop better strategies for recruiting women candidates?
7. Why do some feminist writers believe that delayed marriage and declining U.S. birthrate are the fulfillment of Susan B. Anthony's prediction that women would need to avoid responsibilities that accompany marriage and parenthood before achieving equality?
8. Explain how traditional, patriarchal definitions of masculinity expect men to control women's behavior and lead to elevated levels of violence against women.
9. Why does politics still have a “masculine” ethos in so many countries around the globe, including the United States? How could politics be reframed to have a “feminine” or gender neutral ethos?

## AMBITION ACTIVITIES

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**Measuring Implicit Gender Bias:** Social psychologists at Harvard have developed an online test designed to measure implicit biases, or those unconscious, knee-jerk reactions based on common stereotypes in mainstream American culture that affect our reactions to members of marginalized groups. Project Implicit is a nonprofit

organization that studies individuals' thoughts and feelings about social attitudes and mental health. The test labeled Gender-Career on the organization's website measures a person's association of women with home and men with career, and, particularly, the individual's association outside of conscious awareness.

Search for Project Implicit's webpage, and log in to take the test labeled Gender-Career, to determine whether you instinctively associate women with family-related topics and men with career-related topics. Your score may surprise you, as very few people can completely avoid effects from the day-in and day-out exposure to traditional gender socialization over years. Discuss with classmates your result, how the result was generated, and your degree of surprise about the result. Then discuss how to eliminate ingrained biases. To what extent is it possible to reshape your own ingrained biases about men and women? What actions could change the biases you have discussed.

### **Discussing the Balance of Caregiving and Household Responsibilities With a Partner:**

One partner is often saddled with unequal responsibility for household chores and childcare. Frequently this is a woman in a heterosexual relationship, and her double workload creates stress and difficult decisions about work-life balance. Unequal responsibilities for household chores and childcare also are thought to suppress nascent political ambition in American women. Greater balance of responsibilities requires conversations between partners, regardless of their sexual or gender orientation, but what would partners discuss, and at what point in their relationship? Brainstorm answers to the following questions, and consider when you would discuss them with a partner. Consider how the type of relationship you have might affect your ability to be involved in civic and political affairs.

#### *Questions about the home or caregiving:*

- Who will be responsible for grocery shopping and preparing meals? Who will be responsible for cleaning the house? Doing the dishes? Keeping up with the laundry? What would be an equal division of labor?
- Who is responsible for "invisible household scheduling," that is, keeping track of who in the family goes where and when?
- Do you want children, and, if you do, who will be the primary caregiver? Or will you share caregiving equally? What would equal caregiving mean in practical, everyday terms?
- Who will do the household finances? Who will do home repair and yard work?

#### *Questions about careers and public service:*

- How would you decide whether to prioritize your career or your partner's career as it relates to moving to live near one of your places of employment?

- How will each partner help the other in terms of balancing career and family life? For instance, who takes off work when a child is sick? Who leaves work early to pick a child up from school?
- How do you think your future work-life balance will influence your ability to be involved in civic and political affairs?

*Questions about how to have this conversation with a partner:*

- At what point in a relationship would you be willing and prepared to discuss these ideas with a partner? When and how would you reassess these ideas as the relationship progresses?
- Do your ideas offer fair expectations of your partner? Are they fair questions to yourself? To what extent, are your ideas influenced by stereotypes about men's and women's innate abilities or prescribed roles?

**Asking a Woman to Run for Political Office:** Research indicates that women need to be asked before they seriously consider running for political office, and they are more motivated by the prospect of passing policies that solve problems and help others than they are by wielding power or holding a prominent position. Write a letter to classmates to ask them to run for office, and, in doing so, reframe public service in terms of solving problems and helping people. Do this by conducting the interview described below.

Interview classmates about their hobbies, voluntarism, political interests, work experience, and people skills. Additionally, ask them questions about the types of social problems they would like to solve and the type of people they would like to help. Use this information to write them letters, explaining the reasons why they are qualified for public service and why they should run for elected office. In order to reframe politics as more than a chance to hold power and be aggressive, include in the letter references to empathy for others, the ability to facilitate deliberation, and the ability to implement change, when applicable. Finally, reflect on your letter. How do the letters present why people are motivated to run for office and the skills it takes to be a good public servant? Do your letters tend to frame public service as “feminine,” “masculine,” or gender-neutral work?

**Addressing Microaggressions:** According to social psychologist Derald Wing Sue, examples of gender-based microaggressions include the following:

- An assertive woman manager is labeled as a “bitch,” while her male counterpart is described as “a forceful leader.” (Hidden message: Women should be passive and allow men to be the decision makers.)
- A woman physician wearing a stethoscope is mistaken as a nurse. (Hidden message: Women should occupy nurturing and not decision-making roles. Women are less capable than men.)



- Whistles or catcalls are heard from men as a woman walks down the street. (Hidden message: Your body/appearance is for the enjoyment of men. You are a sex object.)<sup>219</sup>

When women challenge microaggressions, they often are told that they are overreacting, being too emotional, or misunderstanding the speaker's true intent—which is simply another form of microaggression sometimes called “gas-lighting.” Make a list of sex-based microaggressions you have experienced personally or have observed directed at other students. With classmates, analyze your lists, and plan to take action. Use this exercise to practice developing the “thick skin” that so many women believe is a prerequisite for a political career.

*Analyze Lists:*

- Compare and contrast your listed experiences. What experiences are similar, and why?
- How do intersectional identities affect the microaggressions experienced by different kinds of women?
- Consider the effect of regular, ongoing exposure to aggressions. How do microaggressions make you (and others) feel or make you (and others) adjust your everyday actions?

*Action:*

- A wide array of sources on the Internet provide suggestions for how to respond to microaggressions—ranging from giving a quick verbal comeback, attempting to educate others, or simply walking away. Which actions are you most inclined to choose? What are the pros and cons of this choice?
- Microaggressions make women feel like unqualified interlopers in male-coded spaces like politics, or like imposters. Ellen Hendriksen, PhD, a clinical psychologist, suggests the following actions for overcoming imposter syndrome: remind yourself of all that you've accomplished, ask someone who is “fan” of you to affirm you, find a mentor (with a similar intersectional identity), and teach something to someone younger, and, in doing so, recall all you know and have to offer.<sup>220</sup> What actions will you and your classmates take to prevent internalizing the negative messages of microaggressions and developing imposter syndrome?

## KEY WORDS

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Ambivalent sexism 169

Americanists 146  
Benevolent sexism 169

Candidate emergence 152  
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